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SUBJECT: OIL COMPANY VICE PRESIDENT CONFIRMS REBEL ATTACK
ON DEFRA OIL FACILITY

¶1. (SBU) On October 25, the Vice President of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), Dr. Yousif Mohamed Ahmed, confirmed that a rebel force took two GNPOC contractors and two Sudanese drivers hostage on October 24. Ahmed was not able to confirm that the rebels were tied to the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), though JEM's website posted news stories attributing the kidnappings to them. According to Ahmed, Egyptian and Iraqi GNPOC contractors were taken captive along with two Sudanese drivers and two vehicles. (Note: Newspaper reports stated that the GNPOC contractors are of Iraqi and Canadian nationality. Ahmed stated that the Egyptian contractor may have dual Egyptian-Canadian nationality.) Ahmed stated that GNPOC representatives spoke to the Egyptian and Iraqi hostages yesterday and that they are being properly treated and are in good condition. Contrary to Sudan Tribune reports, Ahmed reported that no Sudanese Armed Force soldiers died in the attack.

¶2. (SBU) Ahmed noted that his company experienced a similar attack before Ramadan. He stated that his company negotiated with rebels and eventually paid ransom for their release. He said his company is reluctant to pay ransom again as it only encourages further kidnappings. In his current consultations with the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Government of Sudan, Ahmed stated that he has asked SAF to refrain from violence in retaking the hostages and to focus on negotiations.

¶3. (SBU) Ahmed did not appear overly concerned about the kidnappings, and said "These things happen fairly frequently in oil producing states such as Sudan."

¶4. (SBU) On a separate matter, Ahmed said sensationalist Sudanese newspaper reports such as that in "Akhir Lahza" about the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) incursion into Hegleg oil field are "totally unfounded." He stated that this was just a routine SPLA troop movement, and that his company even supports such movements by occasionally providing water and food to them.

FERNANDEZ